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Biz of Acq — From Student to Supervisor: Ten Management Tips for Recent Graduates

by **Christy Edina Allen, MLS** (Head, Receiving and Invoice Management Section, Walter Royal Davis Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Acquisitions Dept. CB# 3902, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-8890; Phone: 919-962-1120; Fax: 919-962-4450) <richc@email.unc.edu>

Column Editor: **Audrey Fenner** (Head, Acquisition Department, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, P.O. Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402; Phone: 336-256-1193; Fax: 336-334-4731) <fafenner@uncg.edu>

Column Editor's Note:

How does a new librarian manage the transition from being a student to becoming a supervisor? Christy Allen has made this step successfully, and offers helpful suggestions from her own experience. — AF

Managing people can be one of the most challenging aspects of librarianship. This is particularly true for graduates who find themselves employed in a supervisory position straight out of library school. When I found myself in this situation, I began developing methods to help ease the transition from student to supervisor. These methods are outlined below in the form of ten management tips. The tips are explained from my perspective as the Section Head of an Acquisitions Department, but they apply to virtually any supervisory situation.

1) Making a Positive First Impression

A supervisor needs to make a positive first impression. To accomplish this, I scheduled an informal meeting with each staff member my first week on the job. I prepared for each meeting by generating a list of discussion topics such as: work history, job satisfaction, job frustrations, and expectations for an effective supervisor. These topics served as a starting point for mutual discussions related to our work and personal lives. Overall, these sessions allowed me to develop a solid understanding of the staff's personalities and work ethics, while generating a positive first impression.

2) Learning Job Duties

I needed to learn the functions of my employees to be a successful supervisor and strong advocate for my Section. To accomplish this, I scheduled a series of sessions where I received training from my staff. These sessions increased

my understanding of the tasks and daily routines of my Section, and boosted the confidence of the employees who felt they were actively contributing to my development as their supervisor.

In addition to the training, I also sought to update or create internal documentation related to each staff member's job. I reviewed the internal documents with the employees, and worked with them to correct any out-of-date or inaccurate information. By working together with the staff on this documentation, I began building the foundation for strong working relationships. Sharing in this task increased my understanding of their duties, individual work styles, and ability to function as a team.

3) Encouraging Open Communication

Communication is critical between staff and supervisor. With this in mind, I tailored my communication method to fit the needs of the employees. I began by questioning each staff member about meetings and learned that the employees preferred to meet in one collective staff meeting rather than individual one-on-one meetings. If an employee needed to meet with me personally, they preferred to stop by my workplace as necessary.

I also made an effort to learn the preferred style of communication for each individual employee. While some of the staff members favored e-mail, others preferred face-to-face communication. I employed their ideal style of communication when needing to communicate with them directly. By tailoring myself to their communication needs, I found that I received a stronger response and created an open dialogue with my staff.

4) Delegating Work

Delegation was the single most difficult supervisory task for me to learn. As a student, I was responsible for starting and finishing tasks by myself. As a supervisor, I learned that del-

egating work was a more beneficial option. Delegation gave me the time to train employees in new skills and functions. Those new skills increased the strength of my department, allowed for professional growth within my staff, and made each employee more marketable. Furthermore, delegation was an implicit demonstration of trust. I trusted the abilities of my staff enough to assign them new projects and increasing responsibilities.

5) Attending Classes and Workshops

As a first-time supervisor, I understood the importance of learning management and supervisory skills. I did this by attending numerous classes offered through the Human Resources Department at the University of North Carolina. I sought out classes that emphasized in-class role playing exercises, so that I could practice the management techniques in a confidential environment. Once I learned these management techniques, I practiced them until I determined which ones were most effective for me and my staff. Management is a continual learning process, and these classes ensured that I learned the most effective techniques for successful management.

6) Reading the Literature

I learned new supervisory techniques by reading articles and books related to management. Although a large body of information is available for library managers, I read across all management spectrums. Indeed, I found myself borrowing tips on motivation, rewards systems, and employee encouragement from corporate management resources. I discovered that reading material across all management settings allowed me to use techniques that I may not have discovered otherwise.

7) Seeking Peer Support and Advice

Attending management classes gave me the opportunity to meet supervisors throughout the university system. After the classes ended, I maintained relationships with some of these supervisors to establish a peer support network. In every management position, situations arise where advice and counsel are needed. After I established this network, I presented management dilemmas and received feedback from fellow supervisors. For particularly tricky situations, I role-played possible courses of action with fellow supervisors. This role-playing gave me the confidence to approach the real-life situation with a calm and collected demeanor.

Because one-on-one peer advice was not

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19.4 to 21 to 19.8. When broken down further, the trend is even more evident. Seven respondents had between one and ten years of experience, 13 had from 11 to 20 years, and 21 had 21 or more years experience.

Library Journals Read

Against the Grain had overwhelming support with 100% of survey respondents. Other journals read were *C&RL* at 64%; *Library Jour-*

nal at 57%; *Choice* at 45%; and 57% selected "other." Among the other journals listed, *American Libraries*, *Journal of Academic Libraries*, and *LRTS* each came in with several votes.

Thank you to all who participated. Your input is greatly appreciated! And congratulations to this year's contest winners, **Jane Caldwell** (Emory and Henry College) and **Thomas Leonhardt** (St. Edwards University). Although the drawing is completely random, **Thomas** has won two years in a row! So be sure to fill out your survey next year and maybe you can be a winner too! 

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. My father was in the Marine Corps, so I grew up in California, Georgia, Japan, and North Carolina.

FAMILY: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

EDUCATION: I was home schooled for 12 years. I have an Associate of Arts from **Coastal Carolina Community College**, a BA in English from **East Carolina University**, and an MLS from the **University of North Carolina** at Chapel Hill.

FIRST JOB: My first job was as a work study student in the Collection Development Department at **East Carolina University**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I am currently in my first full-time position as the Head of the Receiving and Invoice Management Section in the Acquisitions Department at the **University of North Carolina**, Chapel Hill.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read and play spades.

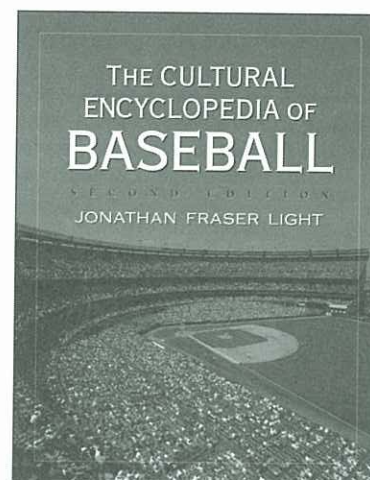
FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Poison Belt* by **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**, *The Pickwick Papers* by **Charles Dickens**, *Les Misérables* by **Victor Hugo**, and *The Symphony of Ages* series by **Elizabeth Haydn**.

PHILOSOPHY: God is in the details!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Completion of my Master's Thesis which required the creation of a bibliography and desiderata list for a **Sherlock Holmes** library collection.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Visit the **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Collection** at the **Toronto Public Library**.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I believe that librarianship will become more focused on instruction and information literacy.



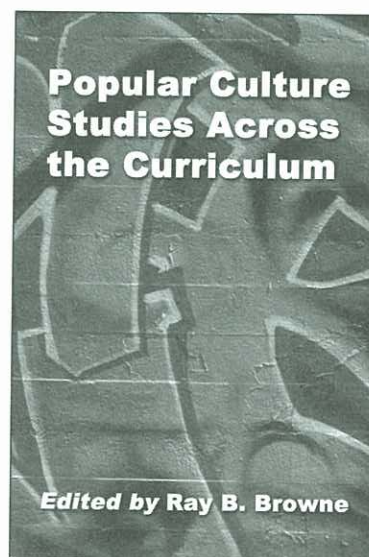
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always possible, I also joined a listserv specifically targeting supervisors. This confidential forum allowed the free and open discussion of personnel issues and management techniques, while offering all members the opportunity to receive and contribute peer advice.

8) Developing Time Management Techniques

Management issues frequently take precedence over regular job duties. Because of this, I built extra time into each day to accommodate any management issues that might arise. This gave me time to manage, while also ensuring that I would complete my scheduled tasks.

I also made my work schedule readily available to staff members. I posted my schedule at my work station in addition to e-mailing it to the staff. If I had a critical deadline or a time-sensitive task, I labeled a block of time "Do Not Disturb". Any time period not listed "Do Not Disturb" was understood to be open for staff visits and impromptu meetings.

9) Developing Stress Management Techniques

As with any job, it is critical for supervisors to learn the most effective techniques for stress management. Learning how to handle stress is an individual process, and should be developed based on personal preferences. Whatever the technique employed, it is important to maintain a calm demeanor. Staff members were more eager to discuss matters with me when I appeared calm and collected. Displaying obvious outward signs of stress made employees think that I was too busy to help them. I also noticed that stress was contagious and negatively impacted the morale of staff. When I maintained a calm appearance, staff seemed more relaxed and easygoing.

10) Enjoying Being a Supervisor

The single most important tip that I can offer first-time managers is to relax and enjoy being a supervisor. The rewards of effective management far outweigh its negative qualities. I have a great deal of pride in the success of my employees, and take a measure of satisfaction in supporting their professional development through training and education. Focusing on the benefits of supervision allows me to maintain a cheerful and optimistic outlook on my job. This outlook is infectious and has shown me that a happy supervisor makes for happy employees.